



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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Contact: Dr. Leonard Eldridge (360) 902-1881
Kate Sandboe (360) 902-1815

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
P.O. Box 42560, Olympia, Washington 98504-2560
Visit our Web site at: agr.wa.gov

WSDA issues emergency order requiring TB tests for cattle

OLYMPIA – In an effort to keep Washington state free of cattle tuberculosis (TB), all dairy cows and bulls six months of age or older are now required to test negative for the disease within 60 days prior to entering the state.

The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) put the restriction in effect today (March 15) through an emergency order. The action is necessary, according to Dr. Leonard Eldridge, the state veterinarian, because of several cases of cattle tuberculosis that have occurred in the last two years in Arizona, California, New Mexico and Michigan. As a result, he said, at least three of those states have lost their TB-free status.

“Introduction of TB into Washington would have severe economic consequences,” Eldridge said. “Because there is no effective treatment for TB in livestock, infected herds must either be destroyed under government supervision, or the herd is placed under quarantine and tested repeatedly, destroying any animals that test positive.

“Even after being released from quarantine, the herd must be tested every year for five years to make sure it remains disease-free. Often depopulating the whole herd is the only practical alternative,” Eldridge said.

Cattle TB is a contagious bacterial infection. Animals are contagious in the early stages of the disease. The disease is most commonly spread by inhalation among confined animals, such as in dairy operations. Since dairy animals are often long lived, infected animals can develop lesions in the lungs, lymph nodes and other organs. The disease is also contagious to humans.

“We support the department of agriculture’s decision as a prudent precaution,” said Jay Gordon, executive director of the Washington State Dairy Federation. “A disease of this nature would have serious consequences for our industry and would affect consumer confidence in our products.”

Also under the new rule, dairy heifers and bull calves *younger* than six months of age being brought into Washington will have to be officially identified with an ear tag and will be restricted at a designated facility until they test negative for TB at six months. Younger calves may be exposed, but cannot be tested accurately until six months of age.

The only exception from the testing order will be dairy cattle from herds tested yearly under a TB-accreditation program, neutered dairy cattle being fed for slaughter, and dairy cattle headed directly to slaughter.

Washington has the highest production of milk per cow in the nation and milk is the second highest-ranked commodity in the state. Washington has not had a case of cattle tuberculosis since 1982.

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